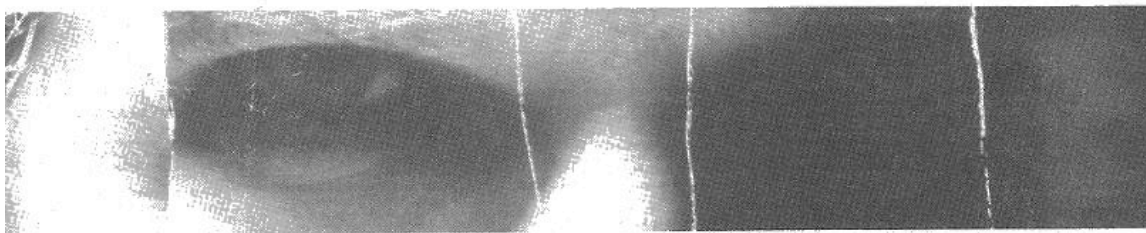


THE VANISHING



Please, make it go away!

by Ross Owens

Jeff Bridges hits a new low as an oddball academic with a predilection toward kidnapping in *The Vanishing*, a laughably bad American remake of a Dutch psychological thriller.

Bridges plays Barney Cousins, a Seattle-born research chemist with unfashionably stringy hair, who walks like a robot with an inner ear problem and talks like Mrs. Olson from the Folger's coffee ads.

Meanwhile, Kiefer Sutherland (decked out in one of his dad's preppie sweaters) and Sandra Bullock play Jeff Harriman and Diane Shaver, an adorable, young unmarried couple with an affection for vacationing by disaster areas.

After a brief spat in the middle of a tunnel that almost leaves them flattened by a tractor trailer, the pair makes up and pledges their undying devotion. Diane seals the deal by presenting Jeff with a cigarette lighter engraved "For-

ever Diane," a truly original gift when you consider that Jeff doesn't even smoke.

Although it seems as though the two kids have their whole life ahead of them, old-fashioned fate and bad screenwriting conspire to derail their young dreams. The trouble starts during a rest stop at a service station just down the road from Mt. St. Helens when Diane takes the time to pick up a lotto ticket and runs into nebbish nogoodnik Barney Cousins in the process. Is this a scathing indictment of the evils of gambling or a subliminal advertisement for the Washington Lottery? It's anybody's bet.

Whatever the answer, it results in the disappearance of Diane Shaver (whose name is an anagram of ARE VANISHED) and may also explain why you always seem to see strange men in parking lots sitting alone in their cars.

Some time later, after twisting the knob of his car radio and adjusting his mirrors both begin to lose their novelty, Jeff saunters into the service station, peeks into the ladies room and discovers that Diane is gone!

Left in the lurch without the love of his life and with only a cigarette lighter to remember her by, Harriman realizes he has no other choice but to take up smoking.

And because he's unwilling to simply let Diane's picture appear on milk cartons, Jeff becomes a tireless spokesperson for his girlfriend's disappearance, hitting dozens of talk shows, where he touches the tabloid hearts of millions of Americans. One smarmy host introduces him as "a very courageous, very tormented young man."

Of course, even obsession has its limits. Although Jeff has turned his search into a cottage industry with book

deals, personal appearances, and undoubtedly a docudrama or two, he still finds the time to fall for Rita Baker (played by Nancy Travis), a feisty, smarter-than-you-think waitress who slings hash at the local diner. (See the section marked Movie Stereo-types, immediately following the entry for "feisty, smarter-than-you-think barmaids.")

Just when it looks as though Harriman is going to lead a normal life, the nutty professor stumbles back into the picture. After three years of fruitless

searching, Jeff finally has a chance to solve the mystery of his girlfriend's disappearance.

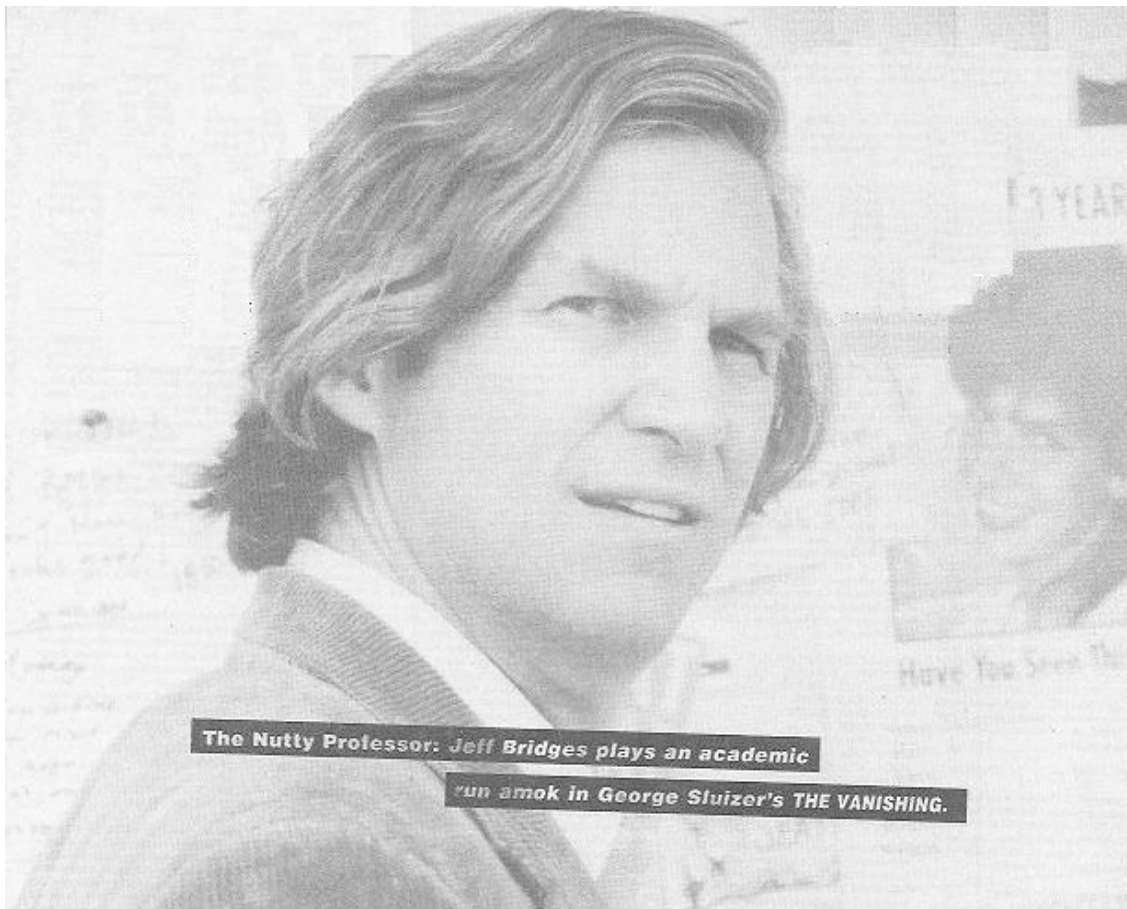
But there's a catch – and it's a fitting one from a Mrs. Olson sound-alike: Jeff must drink a cup of doped-up coffee if he's to ever know what happened to his beloved Diane.

What follows is one of the most overacted and outrageously implausible movies in recent memory.

The strangest twist in this whole inane story is that both the Dutch thriller and the

American dud were directed by the very same man, George Sluizer (whose name is an anagram for nothing important). How could this be? Although the film is way off the mark, the title's right on target. As it happens, *The Vanishing* is a pretty fitting name for this mediocre movie.

Apparently, somewhere between the Netherlands and the United States, all the elements that once made this film a brilliant thriller... just disappeared!



The Nutty Professor: Jeff Bridges plays an academic

run amok in George Sluizer's THE VANISHING.